

WHERE'S THE EROSION?

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Nearly everyone agrees that Iowa has a serious erosion problem. A lot of folks believe that there is serious erosion in their neighborhoods. Some people are sure that their neighbors have a serious erosion problem. However, when it comes right down to our very own land, very few of us feel that erosion is present.

This is a very unfortunate situation. If we don't believe that we, personally, have a problem, we certainly won't act to correct it - you can't fix what you don't think you have.

The main gist of the situation is that soil erosion is sneaky. Unless there is a gully forming, we don't even see the erosion. When a gully is present, the soil loss is probably in the 30 to 40 ton per acre range. Allowable soil loss is 5 ton per acre. That 25 to 30 ton difference, in many cases, cannot readily be noticed.

Soil is lost, either through wind or water erosion in small layers. The process is gradual and hard to detect. Think of soil as a tablet of paper. Taking a sheet off at a time is hard to notice, but soon, the tablet is gone. Soil erosion occurs in much the same way. Thin layers of black topsoil are taken off, and eventually only brown subsoil remains.

The only realistic way to find out your current soil loss is to use the wind and water erosion equations. However, in general, the steeper your land, the more corn and beans in your rotation, and the blacker you till the soil each fall, the higher your erosion loss is.

In North Central Iowa, we are fortunate. The bulk of our erosion problem can be controlled by reduced tillage. The reduced tillage offers a real bonus. Not only will it help in erosion control, but it also can help increase profits. Less tillage can mean less fuel, less labor, and less erosion.

Don't be so quick to point your finger at the neighbor. Take some action to find out your own erosion situation and find out exactly what your current soil losses are.

The first step to take is to find out your erosion rates by contacting your soil conservation office. If you exceed the 5 ton loss rate (and most do), take step two to reduce your erosion. Step two is to reduce your tillage and leave crop residues on the surface, thus saving valuable topsoil.

Take these actions, and then you truly can say that Iowa has a serious erosion problem; you can say that your neighborhood has serious erosion; you can say that you neighbors are losing too much topsoil; and, you can then also say with confidence that you do not have excessive erosion on your land.